

**Libertyville, IL** - Congressman Mark Kirk joined 8<sup>th</sup> graders at Libertyville's Highland Middle School to talk about the dangers of MySpace.com.

One in five kids in America are approached by online predators and only one in four children tell their parents about it.

Congressman Kirk was joined by Patricia Fix, who heads the Lake County State's Attorney Cyber Crimes Unit, to discuss warning signs kids and parents should watch while online.

According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, over 50,000 sexual predators are online at any one time. Over 85 million people are registered on MySpace.com, including millions of American children.

Local and national media have done several investigative reports exposing safety concerns related to social networking websites and how easy it is for a pedophile to contact a child online.

"One in five children receives unwanted sexual advances online," said Kirk. "Social networking sites contain web pages for tens of millions of American children. Using the anonymity of the Internet, pedophiles found a virtual hunting ground to prey on unsuspecting children. To counter this growing risk to their children, parents must monitor what their kids may be posting on these social networking sites. The so-called "friend" kids are connecting with online may actually be a child predator."

Kirk stressed safety while speaking to the 8th graders, "One of the most important rules is, never give out personal information like your name, home address, school name or telephone number," said Kirk.

State's Attorney Fix offered warning signs that students and parents should watch for based on the cases she has seen and the trends and tricks pedophiles have used to contact kids through social networking sites.

This summer Congressman Kirk held a congressional hearing on H.R. 5319, the Deleting Online Predators Act. During the hearing, Congressman Kirk heard disturbing details of two cases prosecuted by the Lake County State's Attorney Cyber Crimes Unit. One involved a 40-year-old male and 14-year-old female who met in a Yahoo chat room and the other found two teachers being prosecuted for Aggravated Criminal Sexual Abuse of two students, ages 15 and 16. The teachers met the students online using instant messaging and e-mail services provided by the school's Web network.

Earlier this year Congressman Kirk joined 10th District high school student body and class presidents from his Student Leadership Advisory Board to shoot TV Public Service Announcements aimed at protecting children from Internet predators. Kirk's advisory board chose to warn parents about the dangers posed by pedophiles on social networking sites after Julie Wachtenheim, student body president at Wheeling High School, was solicited by an online predator.

"As kids, many of us were taught never to talk to strangers. As parents our message must change with technology to include strangers on the Internet," said Kirk. "Parents are faced with the important task of closely monitoring their children's online activities, but they cannot watch their children 24 hours a day. They need to be assured that their government and educational institutions are protecting their kids as well. And that's why I worked to ensure passage of the Deleing Online Predators Act."

Congressman Kirk co-authored H.R. 5319, the Deleting Online Predators Act, which passed the House of Representatives on July 26 with overwhelming bi-partisan support 410-15. The legislation limits the ability of pedophiles to reach children who use online social networking sites in public schools and libraries.

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